Dwelling Portably

for
POB
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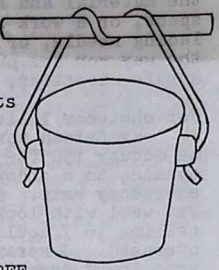
Stick makes cord handle more comfortable.
Without it, the cord digs painfully into my hand. The stick must be LONG or the cord will slip off.

The cord may be on several light objects bundled together as a hand-carry, or on a pail. I often find pails lacking handles, to which I attach cords. Also, I often remove wire handles (easy with vise grips) and replace with cord for lightness and quiet. Julie Summers, OR 973, April 1999



Plastic bottles make good eyeglass cases.
Lighter weight than cases sold - and FREE.
Some lotion bottles are ideal size. I cut off enough of the top to BARELY fit the glasses in (so they don't fall out). Or, if too wide, I put a rubber band around it. Julie, 1996

Steel bread boxes are rodent-proof food-storage containers.
I often find them in thrift stores. Bruce of BC, May 99

All-metal ammunition boxes good for storing electrical gear.
Look for ones with good gaskets, and levers that pry the lids closed tightly. Put gear inside with a drying agent. The contents are relatively safe from water, animals, fire if not intense, and EMP from a nuke weapon (or close lightning strike?) because the metal shields contents. Paul Doerr, 1991

Wear gloves when handling watch batteries.
Touching them with bare fingers may put sweat on them which can gradually discharge them and shorten their lives.
I prefer lithium watch batteries. They still work in sub-zero cold where other batteries conk out. I had a cheap Casio wrist watch with a 5-year lithium battery. Bruce of BC

Cheap, light way to sharpen blades; even stainless.
Buy a variety pack of silicon carbide sandpaper (five 5x11" sheets < $5). Place paper FLAT on (eg) wood block. Stroke blade against grit, just like with a sharpening stone. Don't press too hard or the grit will quickly wear out. (Silicon carbide is very hard but BRITTLE.) Use coarse grits (eg, 80) for removing much metal; then fine grits (over 200) for honing. The finer the grit, the keener the edge. (Cutting oil did not help, and it unglued the paper.)
For convenience, glue sandpaper to one end of a wood block. Use remainder of block as handle. If stuck on with rubber cement, worn-out sheets easily replaced. Silicon carbide is so labeled on package or sheets. Usually black. Greg DeLoach, ME 040, June

Before you use force, remember of course:
Always steer clear, of all that is dear:
Your eyes and your nose, your thumbs and your toes;
Your forehead and chin, your thighs and your shin.
Make sure all your body parts are clear before applying force with any tool, especially sharp ones such as needles, knives, saws. Ask yourself where the tool will go if

your stroke is longer than expected or the tool slips off your material or goes all the way thru. Especially when using awl, knife or screwdriver to pierce with, assume it will go thru the material and beyond. Make sure it will go harmlessly into space, or a work surface - NOT into your palm or thigh ! A lacing needle, or awl used to tighten a knot, will keep going the way you are pulling if lace breaks or awl slips. Pull in a safe direction, or brace elbows to limit stroke. Julie (?)

For one year I lived in a cellar in Toronto.

My friend was opening a small cafe, so I asked him to let me occupy 150 ft^2 of the basement. A small south-facing window opening to a sidewalk grate, let in some light and provided an emergency exit. I cleaned out some junk, then put up a simple 2x4 wall with locking door. I sound-insulated the wall and ceiling so I could practice on my sax - and not hear footsteps overhead. I spray-painted the walls with white latex, and put some found carpet on floor. (City folks throw out good stuff.)

I used the cafe's washroom, but urinated into wide-mouth bottles and sometimes just poured into the floor drain (to city sewer). For showering I used another bathroom, above the cafe, though sometimes I went to a public swimming pool.

I prepared simple meals on an alcohol camping stove, and had a small bar frig. Eventually I made a deal with the cafe and swapped dish washing and clean up for food.

I set up a small desk for writing, and could play my horn, listen to music, or watch a small TV. Rent: $75/mo. The building owner was pleased: my work had improved the basement.

I was renovating a school bus to live in (see May97 DP). When done, and agreed year over, I moved. Fred, Ont., March 99

Advantages of various kinds of insulating boards.

Caution: the half-inch thick aluminum-faced insulating board (in Aug99 DP), is a type of fiberglass. When cut or rubbed, it releases particles which are harmful to breathe. Also, when wet, its insulating value is almost zero.

Another rigid insulation available is blue board. Designed for underground use, it is impervious to water (it even floats). It is a type of styrofoam, so particles are not harmful. I am familiar with 1" and 2" thicknesses. Laura LaBree, WA 981, Oct

(Comment:) Unlike styrofoam, fiberglass does not melt, or burn and emit toxic fumes. That may be why it's much used in home construction (building codes). But no reason to use it where fire unlikely or where occupants can easily escape. B & H

Duct tape and first-aid tape can be re-rolled.

I carry duct tape in my fanny pack for expedient repairs of tents, packs, shoes, bikes, etc. But an economy roll is big and heavy. So I re-roll some onto (eg) a stick. Julie, 1996

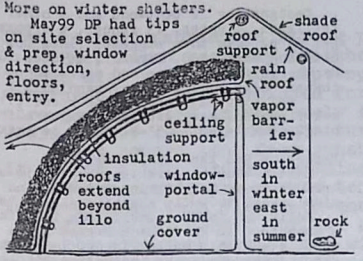
How many window layers ? More not always better.

The more layers (spaced ½" to 1" apart), the greater the insulation but the less light passed. Also, the less condensation on inner surface. But condensation not always bad.

Most winters we have two layers and, with two occupants (and no heater), our 10-ft-D 4½-ft-high inner shelter is usually 60 to 65°F (and hotter when sunny or cooking). So far, this winter has been mild, so we've had only one layer. Result, 5° cooler, and more condensation (which collects in a trough and has to be sponged up every two days). But clothes dry faster, and mold stopped growing on the typewriter case. Bert

More on winter shelters.

May99 DP had tips on site selection & prep, window direction, floors, entry.



Here I'll discuss the shelter itself.

Though I've necessarily drawn a particular shape, what is best will depend on site, use, builder, and materials. A partially underground structure, with roof flush with the ground surface (such as in May95 DP), will be more sheltered from wind, less visible, and warmer during cold spells (because of heat from more earth surface exposed). However, digging may be impractical: ground frozen, solid rock, weak soil (sand), no drainage (swamp), or too little time.

To minimize transport, use mostly materials abundant nearby.

Though a single part may do more than one thing, I'll discuss: ceiling support, vapor barrier, insulation, and roofs.

Ceiling support might be branches interwoven or tied together to form a partial dome. Most branches are curved, and may be more available than straight poles. Conifers (eg, cedar, fir) are more durable than most broad-leaf trees. If sheltered, may last ten+ years. Mid-age dougfirs may have dead lower branches still sound. Drawback: pitchy.

However, for a dug-out, straight poles are easier to use. Lay across hole with ends extending at least a foot beyond.

A small shelter might not need frame. Vapor barrier might be strong enough.

The vapor barrier keeps moisture (of breathing and cooking) out of insulation. Otherwise, during cold, vapor condenses: adds weight (danger!), lessens insulation, and eventually drips on occupants. Common polyethylene plastic is fine unless more strength is needed for (eg) a ceiling with no frame, or wide gaps. If you dislike buying plastic (which causes more to be made), look in furniture store dumpsters for shipment wrappers. (Stores generally love people to take them; else they quickly fill dumpster. The store may have more inside: ask.) If plastic holey, overlap wrappers.

For insulation, use anything fluffy or foamy that is ABUNDANT nearby. (But, fiberglass hazardous.) Bubble plastic passes light, but I've not found much. I find thin white foam (pads shipments). Too weak and squishy for mattress, but okay for insulation if nothing heavy will rest on it. To reduce amount needed, sheets might be spaced apart with (eg) dfir cones or styrofoam chips. If chips abundant, use to loosely fill plastic produce bags, then nestle bags together. (If loose, chips can blow.) Or suspend a few sheets of plastic ½" to 1" apart. (See Apr92 DP) Remember: stilled air is what insulates; not the solid material.

Natural insulations: moss, leaves, hay. Gathering and hauling laborious, but can be done gradually after shelter is erected. If below freezing, snow can help insulate but needs other insulation under it; else shelter will remain cold and will gradually melt the snow.

In a dry climate, the roof might rest directly on the insulation. Otherwise I'd suspend it above; else puddles may form and compress insulation, or seep through small holes. In illo, the rain roof, which might be a big clear plastic tarp, is supported by poles or ropes (which are fastened to trees or braced-poles at the side - not shown).

The site may include trees or bushes with live branches extending over the shelter. If not, and if the shelter will be left up during sunny seasons, a shade roof will protect the rain-roof plastic from sun; and reduce visibility. Any dark cloth will do. Acrylic resists both sun and rain. (Some, in partial shade, has lasted us 20 years.) B & H

Rustic Retreats: build-it-yourself guide.

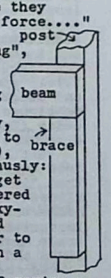
David and Jeanie Stiles provide brief instructions and diagrams for 26 diverse structures including: bowers, huts, small houses, cart, and cabin raft. Diagrams are generally clear and well-chosen for conveying much info briefly.

Tools, safety and joints get 7 pages. "Without electric power, the most difficult job: ... boring holes." Battery-powered drill suggested. "The most important hand tool is a crosscut saw with Teflon coating or a stainless steel blade and ten teeth per inch." If it binds, "spray the blade with silicone sliding compound or rub it with soap." 25 tools listed in order of usefulness.

"Thousands of accidents on ladders every year." Make sure legs are level and stable (but not mentioned: side-bracing tall ladder with cords). Never climb to top or above spot it leans on.

Nails "must be used perpendicular to the expected force. Use only galvanized nails and, if necessary, drill a pilot hole to avoid splitting." "Screws have 3 times the holding power of nails. Bolts are the best fastener because they provide a permanent clamping force...."

I question some of their post joints. One they call "strong", I call "less weak". And, to attach a beam part way up a post, they recommend notching both members, which is extra work, and weakens them. I say, better to simply fasten beam to post (which they call "weak"), and add brace piece below, thusly:



Windows, doors and roofs get 11 p. Some roofs are encumbered with chimneys, turrets and skylights, which are complex and prone to leak. I say, better to put them thru a wall, beneath a roof with a big overhang.

For a handcart "capable of moving up to 500 pounds" they specify used 26" bicycle wheels. I say: too weak sideways, especially on rough ground at a construction site. 20" BMX wheels stronger.

Seven different huts get 30 p. Most are as complex as small houses. Simplest is a bent-pole hut covered with plastic and then "camouflaged with twigs, branches, or whatever is handy"; and a

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lean-to thatched with boughs. "A very crude lean-to can be built in less than an hour using only an axe. However, one that will last more than one season and repel rain may take 2 or 3 days."

"Primitive native shelters": wigwam (3p), tipi (6p), yurt (6p), and stacked log hogan (4p). Canvas covered, except hogan which needs MANY logs.

Tree huts get 12 pages. A few of 15 guidelines: "Never design your tree hut first and then try to find a tree that fits. Let the tree suggest to you what the design should be." "Make safety your first consideration." "Allow for flexibility in the joints so the tree can grow and move with the wind." "You can nail or screw into large trees without causing much damage." Eek! ANY metal put into tree may cause you to be cursed when, long after hut is gone and tree dead and down and being cut up, someone's saw hits a forgotten nail !

This book inspires thinking about a wide variety of shelter shapes and construction techniques, though not always the most simple and reliable.

Bibliography describes 23 books, 2 periodicals, 6 catalogs (Campmor, Bean, Defender (marine), Silvo Hardware, Woodcraft, Harbor Freight Tools).

1998, 159p.8x11 (much white space), many diagrams, 2 color photos, $20 + shipping?,ISBN 1-58017-035-8. Storey Books, Schoolhouse Rd, Pownal VT 05261. Has 11 other home do-it-yourself books. 1-800-441-5700; www.storey.com (B&H)

Making Bentwood Trellises, Arbors, Gates.

Also from Storey, Jim Long's book is about decorative structures. But the techniques can also (eg) form a shading over-roof at a semi-permanent camp-site.

"Bentwood projects ... can be made from a vast variety of woods. The main requirement: use green, flexible limbs for the arched parts." Cut "no more than 24 hours before you begin.... Wood loses flexibility quickly." Not fully restored by soaking. Before you cut, decide on a design and list the arch pieces needed.

Jim discusses good and bad traits of 29 eastern trees, including toxicity and invasiveness, in 15 p. Most rot in 2 or 3 years, except: bald cypress (Taxodium distichum), but hard to find and often short and stocky; eastern red cedar (Juniperus virginiana), but sap slightly sticky and needles mildly irritating; and osage orange (Madura pomifera). Not mentioned but we have used: western red cedar (Thuja plicata). It has relatives elsewhere (also called arborvitae).

"Settlers moving west in early 1800s took osage orange cuttings" and planted them "in rows spaced every 3 ft, then allowed to grow together into a dense hedge that was cut every 3 or 4 years... Impossible for cattle or people to penetrate hedge due to the tough, dense limbs and the short thorns along them."

"As the wood dries it will lose its flexibility, so don't try to reshape.... Joints that are wired will need to be retightened after shrinkage occurs."

Jim also tells (in 4p.) how to form a living arbor by training live saplings/bushes/vines. That takes much longer as they must grow, but endures. Of the ten plants suggested, hemlock (Tsuga) and holly (Ilex) have foliage year-around.

Designs for 22 bentwood and 9 other trellises, 6 gates, 13 fences, 4 arbors get 96 p. Jim then suggests vines for climbing them, and, finally, devotes 10 p. to recipes for teas and cakes to ingest while admiring your handiwork !

1998, 158p.8x9 (much white space), 14 color photos, many diagrams. $20 + shipping? ISBN 1-58017-051-X. (addr to left)

Report on Ero tent and a moss hut.

Last autumn we were temporarily in an area where we had little equipment and didn't want to build anything elaborate.

Holly had found a small dome tent in a dumpster; in good shape except poles missing and hole melted in netting. The floor showed no wear, indicating little use. Made in China for Ero Industries, Morton Grove IL 60053; sold by FredMeyer. 60x92x38"; floor 4.5oz reinforced polyeth, walls 1.7oz nylon taffetta. Much like the Taiwan-made Stansport (see May 96 & 97 DPs) except the door zipper was less convenient (⊥instead of ∩ routing).

One problem: the top was net, with a fly (hooked-on tarp) suspended above, giving much ventilation whether wanted or not. (Done so someone can't asphyxiate self with candle, causing lawsuit?)

I salvaged slender branches from a fallen cedar and, by lashing two together with thin ends overlapping, made poles long enough to erect tent - with difficulty: I had to add side bracing cords to stabilize. (Maybe branches were less stiff than original poles.)

But the tent alone, with its unstoppable ventilation, gave little warmth. Okay at night when huddled under sleeping bags. But not for frosty early mornings when we wanted to do things inside while waiting for outside to warm up.

An old moss-covered maple had fallen nearby. That inspired me to build a moss hut around the tent. I did not trust the tent to support the moss (it barely held up itself !). So, over the tent, I made a squat tipi-like frame (from little alders in need of thinning), and layed moss on that. I had to repeatedly chink thin areas and sags. (I used MUCH moss.)

To reduce ventilation, and keep our breath moisture out of the moss, I covered the tent with plastic; except the door on which I hung several burlap bags which we raised to enter. When we wanted light inside, we replaced the burlap with plastic. To keep dew and rain off the moss, another tarp went over it, extending to the ground on 3 sides, but tied out in front to form an antiway in which we could remove rain wear and keep water and pee containers.

After ALL THAT, we were comfortable. One cold mid-Oct dawn, outside measured 29°F, inside 60°. Quite dry after moss added. (With tent alone, condensation on walls trickled down into our foam pads, becoming wet spots.) Minor gripes: moss fragments fell on us and bed when we went in or out; tent walls sagged. YKK Winnebago plastic zippers all worked at first, but outer one soon failed.

Despite having a level site and all items within 200 yds, project took ± 30 hours. Worthwhile for a two-month stay? Probably not. But educational. Bert

Our backyard tent rotted in the sun !!!

We set up a smaller tent, but keep it covered during day. Phyllis, CA 921

Durable tent fabric and strong poles.

Stephenson recently switched from urethane-coated nylon to "ultra high tenacity 30d ripstop nylon with durable silicone waterproof finish (developed for parachutes)... about 30 times stronger. Finish is extremely slippery, thus stays clean and wears better ... and doesn't turn sticky from damp...."

Best remove tent from sunshine. But, "if you MUST leave it in sun A LOT, order aluminized top" (± $100 extra).

Stephenson's pre-curved tent poles "resist 20 times more force than do thin flexed-to-shape poles used on" most tents.

Though not needed for our kind of camping, Stephenson's products give much protection with little weight. Eg, "with optional inside wind stabilizers, tents can survive in winds to 160 mph." Sleeping bags adjust for -60 to +60°F. Bags from $400; tents, $600. Thought-provoking "1998 to ?" catalog, 12p.8x11, $2? Stephenson's, 22 Hook Rd, Gilford NH 03246

Many people here live in the forest or are homeless.

Rents in Santa Cruz are way too high, so people opt for other ways to obtain shelter. Ben, RhiZone, CA 950, August

Car Living: How To Make It a Successful, Sane, Safe Experience.

Jane Archer, the author, owns property in the midwest with no amenities, where she spends much time. "To save money on motel bills, I live in my car and in a tent." But unlike Jane, most "people who choose to live in their cars, do so under stressful conditions" when making good decisions is difficult. "The purpose of this book is to help you think thru the process of Car Living BEFORE you choose to do it." "A car is a perfect temporary home ... for a transitional time...."

Some "cities may give tickets for loitering. To help keep this from happening to you, move car often, and do not call attention to yourself.... Truck stops, as long as they feel safe, are good places to park because people expect cars and trucks at all hours.... (Or) a telemarketing center...."

"'The hardest part was law enforcement,' explains Julie about parking her car by the university in Berkeley. When the police shined a light on her face, she would have to move to another spot." Also bad: corner markets because of noise, and drug deals which attracted police. Julie preferred a neighborhood of professional people farther from campus. It was quieter, and cops patrolled there less. (However, some DP authors report fewer hassles in "lower class" neighborhoods.)

Joyce "parked her car in an upscale neighborhood" and put on a car cover to make her old beater seem expensive. "Once inside, Joyce had complete privacy." Or, rig a privacy shield inside with fabric and duct tape. But if so high it covers windows, that will draw attention. Or, use a disguise. "'I'd lie in back seat in sleeping bag and put food bags over me.'"

When Ian stopped at edge-of-town spots, he checked for butt heaps and beer cans, to identify and avoid lovers' lanes and teen party places, which would get noisy and draw cops.

Each national forest sets its stay length. Typical: 14 days within a 30-day period. "After 14 days, legally you must leave" and be away 16 days before returning to same forest.

Jane also discusses: appearing "normal"; communicating with relatives, friends, employers; keeping clean; finding good clothes cheap; scoring free or low-cost meals; places to "hang out"; and when to seek shelter other than car. Though this book gives more parking tips, DP authors have told more about how to secure food, shower/bathe, and pee/poop. Jane lists addresses and phones of Community Voice Mail (phone

message) systems in 28 cities; and 18 sources for more info. 1999, 70p.5x8, ISBN 0-9649573-1-0. (Address on page A or B.)

Free parking for live-in vehicles ?

Many community parks allow free camping, usually boondocking (no piped water or power), but sometimes with limited hookups. Some fed lands allow boondocking, but usually charge.

My husband and I spent $3 total for camping fees during our first 3 years on the road as full-time RVers. That was for one night in a NM park on the Mex border. Coleen Sykora (from Workers On Wheels #24)

(Comments:) My impression: communities that offer free camp sites are generally in long-depressed areas (eg, Great Plains) where chambers of commerce try desparately to attract retirees or anyone who will spend money. (Years ago, DP got a brochure from a highway assoc in s.Nebraska listing free camping there.)

In western Oregon, though there may be possibilites we do not know about (not having a motor vehicle, we are not keenly attentive), the only campgrounds we know of close to cities are not free. (And we've heard of people ticketed for sleeping in vehicles parked on streets.) Farther out, there are many graveled logging roads, negotiable by most pickups and vans, and some sedans. (But I'd not take a motorhome.) Many of the roads, espec close to cities, have locked gates (more now than 20 years ago) and are posted against motor vehicles (though motorcycles often bypass gates): often fine for hikers and bicyclists. Most gravel roads are occasionally patrolled by police or timber-company security (depending on whose land: some areas are a checkboard). There are many dead-end spurs where one can park away from the main road. B & H, OR 973

Protecting a trailer against thieves and vandals.

Replying to Angela in Nov99 DP: many things can be done to make a trailer safer. Most cost less than $50 and are sold by building supply stores. Old trailers are less-easily made safe than mid-1970s and later, because built differently.

First: install an interlocking hinge protector. This keeps door from being jacked open, or pried open with crowbar; because the hinge locks from the hinges, not the door handle.

Next: add lock guards that go over door next to handles. Door knobs and dead-bolt locks also worth adding or changing.

Also good: reinforce door frame with 2x4s nailed into the wall. This helps prevent jacking a door open. (A burglar can use a car jack to force apart the frames on each side of a door. After half an inch, the door will just swing open.)

Windows, too, need attention; especially any near ground level. Bolt on Plexiglas, Lexan or other coverings that are difficult to break. If caulked, they also add insulation.

Home security systems can be bought and easily installed, and you can subscribe to a monitored alarm system. There are other possibilities, but these will get you started.

Remember: even a fort will not keep burglars out if the occupants don't do their part. Lock your doors, get to know your neighbors, and tell them what you would like them to do if they see anyone but you go into your trailer.

If someone is strongly determined to get in, they will. But with some thought and a little work, you can make breaking-in too difficult to tempt a casual thief. Steven Cleveland, TN 377, Dec

(Comment:) Instruct your neighbors CAREFULLY. If (eg) a friend arrives before you do and enters with your permission, you don't want someone over-reacting and calling the police !!

Be wary of distant job offers, especially at campgrounds.

If seeking work, I'd only go to areas where I wanted to spend time whether or not I found jobs. Then, while there, I'd check out what was available. If I found a camping facility I thought I'd like, I'd stay there a few days to get a feel of the place and to learn what work they might need.

I've heard many horror stories about people who accepted far-away jobs and spent much time and money traveling to them, and then were unhappy. Coleen Sykora (from Workers on Wheels)

For quick earning with little expense, consider cab driving.

I can almost always get a job immediately, anywhere in the country. Drivers often quit, and cab owners are anxious to keep their equipment rolling.

After 6 months, a driver will usually start to 'burn out' and not put in as many hours. That's okay: if you've worked hard and not spent much, you'll have enough money to move on.

I just quit the best deal I ever had: 38% of meter plus owner paid gas. I did so much business I couldn't handle the stress. But I now have enough to live modestly for two years.

I usually lease a 24-hour (single shift) cab and sleep in it, bathing at public facilities. Generally, if one is working hard, the owner gives you a lot of leeway.

You will need a valid drivers license with good record, and a sense of direction and ability to rapidly learn your way around. Cab driving is a good way to scout a new area, and gain information and interesting experiences.

I buy a map and (if available) a cab-drivers handbook. The handbook tells the city's numbering system, and the map shows lakes, rivers, railroads which break up the system.

Alas, driving is becoming increasingly competitive and, in big cities, regulated. Also, some cities are dangerous, even if one knows the streets well. I advise: small towns, or working-class suburbs adjacent to big cities. Depressed areas are actually good places to make money as many people there can't afford cars. You'd be surprised how many people I take to welfare offices. Waitresses and bartenders often tip well, because THEY depend on tips. Las Vegas is, by universal acclaim, the best place to earn big bucks. As with anything, ask the old timers - which will be easier after one has 'hacked' a few times. Kurt Wettstein, IL 606, March 99

Are freight trains more dangerous than highway vehicles ?

(Responding to Laura's report in Nov99 DP:) One of my uncles worked many years as an engineer (train driver). He told about folks trying to hop freights. Of how they were injured trying to get on, and of hassles by railroad security. Ever since, I've stayed far away from moving trains.

Hopping may be a thrill for some folks. But I'm content to walk, hitch, or get rides other ways. You are correct that known hobo camp-sites become targets of police. Steven, TN377 Dec

(Comment:) Someone in Hobos From Hell (review in May96 DP) thought railroads were safer than highways, at least for going long distances. Though getting on and off a moving train is risky, while on, you are relatively safe, provided you (eg) avoid cargo that might shift and crush you ! Yes, railroad security can be nasty. But so can highway police. These days with ANY mode of travel, do it only if you have a STRONG reason to, and KNOW what you are doing !!!

To anyone considering hopping, I strongly recommend the Hobos From Hell books (review, at least) for safety tips. B&H

I spent summer in the police states of Florida and Louisiana.
The Florida Marine Patrol stopped my slow boat on a slow day. After I was interrogated and my boat searched, and cited for no life preserver on board, I was "free" to go if I would wear a state-loaned life jacket. (I wonder how the REAL natives (Creek, Apalach, Seminole) survived for centuries without life jackets in their canoes !) Which is the least policed of the 50 police states ? I want to move somewhere and be left alone. I've been living car-free for almost a year. Jimmy, TN 374,Jan

Be wary of "welfare agencies", especially if you have kids.
A family consisting of mother, father, and two children age 4 and 6, had been living in their van, going from day job to day job. A local church announced a food bank for needy folks. But, when the family asked for food, the church turned them in to police. The children were taken into custody by child "protection services" and the parents were arrested for "child endangerment." The parents are now out of jail and trying to get their kids back, so far to no avail. Steven, TN 377, Dec

Pluma Beyer (who edits/publishes Green Pathfinder) lives in a 12x12 ft cottage she built. The cottage has electricity, stove, sink, and running cold water; but no frig. Hot water is obtained by heating on the stove.
After giving birth, Pluma's sister was staying with Pluma. Social workers visited, supposedly to make sure the baby was well cared for. They pretended to be friendly, and left. Two hours later they returned with police, snatched "the two-day-old baby from the arms of its mother who was successfully breast-feeding it", and took it to foster care. They cited the baby's temporary surroundings. Several months and one court hearing later, the baby had not been returned. Pluma reports, "I am astonished at how social workers lie." TN 376

(Comments:) Social workers have an incentive to lie ! In May 97 DP, Tom Van Doren in Idaho reported: "State social services get $4000 from the government for every child they put into a foster home. They keep 75%, and are not responsible for what it is spent on." Also in May97, Michael Sunanda reported on kids snatched from people he knew. And we've read many horror stories elsewhere. Tips for avoiding trouble in Dec96 DP. Though most portable dwellers less jeopardized than rooted folk (either hard to find or quick to move), best avoid roads and public places (except maybe summer when many kids about).

After any suspicious encounter, promptly move on.
Local news item: A 15-year-old boy was playing basketball. Needing to pee, to save time he went into bushes. An 8-year-old girl saw him and told her mother who called police. They arrested him, charging child abuse. He was convicted of exposing himself and is now in a juvenile prison with a sex crime permanently on his record. Steven Cleveland, TN 377, Dec

(Comments:) If the boy had immediately left the scene, he probably would have been well away by the time the police arrived. (But maybe he didn't know he'd been spotted.)
When we visit cities, we often use bushes, not only to pee, but for jug showers, and to temporarily stash and later retrieve big items we don't want to lug around: all activities a law-n-order fiend might consider offensive or suspicious. Of course, we use (eg) undeveloped park areas where few people go. But accidents happen. If spotted, we quickly leave the area.

How to live during tough times ?

Recently, many readers have asked this or similar questions. Some say the USA (USSA?) is now a police state. And police are not the only threat.

Is a portable dwelling safer than a house or apartment ? That depends on particulars, as there are many options.

During our 20-odd years dwelling portably, Holly and I have had very few scary encounters; and no arrests or fines, serious injuries or illnesses, or major property losses. Because we did things right? Or mostly luck? Anyhow, for what they're worth, our suggestions.

Minimize travel on roads. Besides bringing hassles, vehicles destroy more years of life and health than does any other menace. (Cancers mostly kill those who have already lived long.)

Recreate near home. Instead of big, far-away gatherings, seek local picnics, etc. For distant fellowship, maybe hold many the same day and link by radio.

If you must travel on roads, ride-share with careful drivers. Keep windows clear (no stickers or danglies) and all lights working. Carry spare bulbs for promptly replacing any burn-outs.

For rest stops, park away from public roads. If bicycling, you might go into some bushes. If motoring, pull into a shopping-center parking lot (where cops seldom hassle unless complaint.) *5/99p3

For long stays, seek private land where you can park (with permission) out of sight of roads and neighbors.

When employed, try to find shelter close to work. Some companies allow employees to park overnight or camp on their lot, and use water and electricity. (Advantages to employer: workers are more available for unexpected rush overtime jobs, and their presence deters burglars.) When choosing a job, pay attention, not to the supposed pay rate, but to how much you can CLEAR after all living costs are paid. *6/88p7

Though a motor vehicle is sometimes useful, ownership is a costly nuisance. If you must have, pick a common one that won't attract attention and that has parts widely available. *5/96p11

Backpackable dwellings are much easier to hide. *5/95p9-12, 5/94p10-11. But, if remote, will re-supply be a problem? Think about various ways to. *5/96p3

Don't expect to find one dwellingway that combines all the advantages of several different ways. Eg, as roomy as a house or big dome, mobile as a 4WD, portable and low-cost as a small tent, and secure as a dug-out. You must choose. However, contrary to beliefs of folks whose only camp-out was an ordeal, physical comfort is quite easily obtained, though may require learning how. *9/84.

Regardless of dwellingway, generally be quiet and unobtrusive. Do anything noisy either in a remote TEMPORARY spot and leave immediately, or in a sound-proof chamber. (Underground? *9/86p5)

Store at least 6 months food. 6 YEARS is better if you expect to remain in the same area. *9/85p1, 6/88p3. But hide in several places to protect from thieves both private and official. (Now law: when an emergency is declared in an area, anyone caught with more than six-months food is eligible for 15 years in prison, REGARDLESS of when purchased!)

Cut costs. Expensive possessions and activities not only attract robbers, but take much of your life to pay for.

Don't train for jobs or start businesses that need licenses.

Get your dwellingway in good shape before having children. Have kids only if you(all) can care for them full-time. (Sticking them in schools forces them into a clash of values between other kids and you, that will likely make them AND YOU miserable.) Keep school-age kids unseen during school hours. *12/96

Don't give up hope. Police states don't last forever. (The 70-year USSR lasted unusually long.) Unless reformed, they eventually bring themselves down by fouling their economy or environment, and alienating supporters. Ordinary people can hasten change by avoiding taxes and fines, and spending less. Eg, a boycott of recreational travel would not only save lives and reduce pollution, but cut the profits of oil companies, auto makers, airlines, and giant resorts - and THOSE folks will get attention if they tell the cops: "lay off" ! Bert & Holly, Oregon 973, January

* DP issue and page with more on topic.

Safety for a woman or child alone.

Best be hard to find. But maybe your camp is temporary and you don't want to spend much time hiding it.

To deter two-legged predators, you might simulate being with other people whose return you expect at any moment. Eg, when a second sleeping bag is not needed for warmth, lay it out to suggest an additional bed. And, beside it, put sweater, jeans, and boots much larger than yours. (If big enough to wear over yours, they'd also give extra warmth.)

Against four-footers I suggest, first a spear, which can be just a sharpened pole of a tough wood (test), light enough to move fast. Jab, DON'T throw. (If you throw, it's GONE!) Also see Nov99 and May95 DPs. Holly & Bert

Be wary of big, dead, high limbs.

Even a small branch can kill or maim if it falls far enough to gather speed. A hard-hat or helmet can save your head from light blows but not heavy ones.

Though limbs and whole trees often fall during winter storms, they also fall on warm summer days when carpenter ants, termites, and fungi are active.

Be alert for breaking sounds above: you may have time to dodge. Also be aware, if you grab or bump a tall slim tree that bends, it may knock something loose high up.

Best not camp near big trees. If you must, choose the base of a straight live conifer (eg, fir, pine) with many large limbs near ground that may intercept branches falling from higher up. Even a plastic tarp adds some protection. (Though weak, it will stretch and absorb energy.) Camp on SIDE (not top or bottom) of narrow valley. (Less wind.)

(B&H)

Choosing pack frames for comfort.

In summer 1999 Outdoor Explorer, Mike Randolph, though writing for rec hikers, gives some advice good for all.

If you hike mostly on trails or easy terrain, choose an external frame with "a high pack bag, which enables the wearer to stand up straight and helps

the frame ... transfer the weight onto hips." Also, "inexpensive, and cool in hot weather because the frame keeps the pack bag away from your back." "If, however, you scramble up mtns and need lots of flexibility," pick an internal frame.

Mike prefers bags with drawstring closures. "Zippers eventually wear out."

Not addressed: how easily can pack bag be removed when frame is used for hauling (eg) pails and boxes, and how well does it endure such use? Extra-strong "freighter" frames are made.

To stow map, compass, sunglasses, etc, Mike favors a pack bag with many external pockets. But they won't help when the pack bag isn't on. I prefer pouches on the waist belt. Or, on a smooth trail, I sometimes wear a small knapsack in front as well as an external frame in back. I can access knapsack's contents without removing anything. Also, the weight in front improves my balance. Drawback: I can't easily see my feet and where they step. To keep the knapsack's straps from slipping off, I put it on first, with the frame's straps over.

For comfort, seek a frame with "hip belt that hugs the sides of your pelvis without creating any gaps. When you have the pack on and it's loaded down, the angle of the hip belt is not right if the belt is tighter at bottom than at top." "Firm foam preferable...."

Shoulder straps should "meet your (shoulders) at a comfortable angle."

"Be wary of stores that carry only one style of frame, and of zealous salespeople who recommend a type of pack before asking the magic question: 'what kind of hiking do you plan on doing?'"

But the proof is in the wearing. "If possible, borrow a friend's pack, fill it up, and take it for a test hike."

Almost any frame will eventually cause sore spots. Not mentioned: if with others, swap loads occasionally, so weight bears on different spots. Or, if carrying in stages, taking one load part way and then going back for the next, use two+ different frames, alternating.

Also not mentioned: building your own. Plans for a simple triangular frame of branches in LLL. Merits, besides being buildable when needed: potentially light-er; easily folds for rides or storage. But loading for comfort takes longer, espec with big hard items like pails.

Polyprop clothing preferred to wool.

(Re March & Sept 84 DPs): I've used polypropelene Boy Scouting, and it kept me dry and warm where wool did not. I make sure new boys' parents get it for them. Steven Cleveland, TN 377, July

Good wicking helps prevent blisters.

California College of Podiatric Med study: runners in cotton socks got twice as many blisters, three times as big, as those wearing acrylic. Dampness blamed: not wicked away as well by cotton as by acrylic or wool. Julie Summers, 1990

Vapor barriers, sweat - and odors.

Stephenson (see p.5) sews vapor barrier liners into sleeping bags, and sells vb undershirts ($25-$30 + ship). He challenges readers: "do a test. (If) you are wearing an undershirt, one or two insulating shirts, and a warm jacket: replace the undershirt with a vb shirt. (Lacking a proper one, use a plastic bag with holes cut for head and arms.) Don't put the jacket back on and you will notice you are as warm as before.... The vb shirt reduces loss of humidity and thus reduces evaporative cooling at your skin...." I'm now trying that and, yes, I need one less sweater. But I put on the plastic bag, not next to my skin, but over my undershirt, because yrs ago:

I was bivying in a city and had only one thin sleeping bag. So I used a big plastic bag as a liner. It was not comfortable next to my skin, clinging to me when I turned over. But it did add warmth. However, after 2 days, despite daily washing of feet and arm pits (but not liner), my whole body and the liner got stinky - much like feet can smell.

Stephenson claims, a vapor barrier reduces odors because of "quick sensing and thus avoidance of sweating, plus blocking of air circulation that causes sweat to turn rancid." But I found, ABSENCE of circulation was what caused odor build up. (Feet stink; not hands.)

(Later.) I've now worn the plastic bag during 7 days, with the same upper-body garments. Only arm pits washed. No unusual odors. Maybe the cloth between skin and plastic allows enough circulation. (However, bag's neck and arm holes enlarged, compromising test.)

I plan to repeat sleeping-bag test, but with a cloth liner INSIDE plastic.

Stephenson's vapor barrier is not a smooth plastic but a "flannel-like soft fabric". Assuming no clinging, perhaps it alone allows enough air circulation. Stephenson claims: "easy to clean with a wipe of a damp cloth (soap or detergent okay if needed)." B & H, February

More about ticks. (Also see May99 DP)

If wearing clothes, smooth fabrics, such as windbreakers, are better than knits. Harder for ticks to grab onto.

If wearing long pants, tuck into socks, so that any ticks that get on feet must crawl up the outside of pants and might be spotted before reaching skin. But ticks may grab on elsewhere.

Any clothes should be light colored, for easier spotting of dark ticks.

If you cut your fingernails short, and seldom carry POINTED tweezers, you might leave parts of a few nails long enough to use as tweezers. Grab tick as close to your skin as possible.

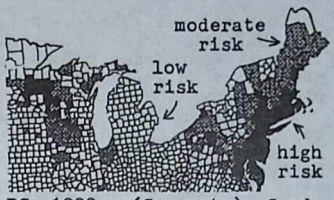
Permethrin "repels 82% to 100% of ticks", but is toxic and absorbed thru skin. If used, apply only to clothes and let dry before wearing. Ditto DEET. An early DP tip: wear cat flea collars on boot ankles. But won't stop ticks above.

Larval ticks feed on mice. To de-infest an area, scatter tubes of cotton balls dipped in insecticide. (Eg, Dammi-nix) Mice use cotton to make nests.

A former lyme patient says: few MDs can/will diagnose or cure lyme (which requires high doses of antibiotics for months). For lyme specialists, plus treatment info (latest only on internet: some librarians can help): www.Lyme.org

The map, from Yale U of Med, shows "lyme risk" by county in ne. Only other mod-risk county: Mendocino CA. But a county may be "low risk" either because ticks few or not infected, OR because humans are seldom outside. Within an

area, risk depends on habitat, espec mouse numbers. A backyard or park may be more hazardous than a remote mtn. H & B, Jan



Store bicycle off ground ?

In May98 DP, Bert reported that a porcupine punctured tires of a bicycle left in the woods. To prevent animal damage, hang bike on tree branches. Bruce of BC, 1999. (Comment:) Good idea where feasible. Unfortunately where we were, no tree suitable for hanging was also where it would get winter sun (desirable for keeping dry and thus minimizing rust). Also, unless hung VERY high, a hanging object is more visible.

Many years we've left bikes over winter in woods, protected only by tarps, with no damage. We were hoping to stay lucky. That winter we didn't. Bert & Holly, OR 973

Folding bicycles are handy but expensive.

In Nov 1998 I bought Car-I-Bike's "Urban" 5-speed at Cruiser Bob's in Oceanside CA for $270. Under 30 pounds with a factory kickstand. No problems so far.

I found the Urban takes about the same effort as a full-size bike. Maybe a bit more on hills. I pulled a trailer shopping, but not up any serious hills. (But a trailer is no fun on hills even with a full-size bike.) I would not use it for loaded touring (only 5 speeds), but I did a comfortable 80 miles in one day out of Seattle with a daypack.

It's best feature: when folded, there is room for it almost anywhere, so I can take it with me to use at a campsite, in town, wherever. Cruiser Bob says, you can stuff it in a bag and carry it on a bus. I also test rode a Dahon but found it way too flexible. Ken Gilbert, WA 982, Nov

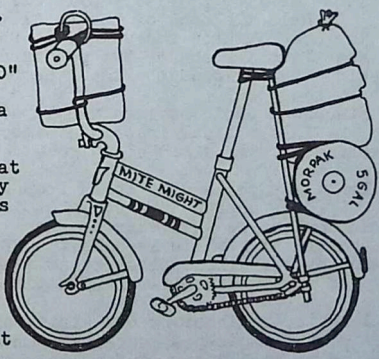
Bicycles with 20" wheels have some advantages for adults.

They fit easily inside trunk, shell or van. Though not as compact as folders, they cost much less. Often found at yard sales. Tires and tubes are cheaper than for 26" wheels. Spokes are shorter and much stronger. BMX one-speeds are built for abuse. But extra-long seat post needed. Ken, Nov

Small bike handy, not speedy.

I'd had trouble fitting a full-size bike into some vehicles. So, when I saw a 20" "kiddy" bike free at a yard sale, I took it. It lacked a seat but was otherwise okay and seemed sturdily built.

Fortunately, I had a seat and a LONG seat post among my parts collection. The post's diameter was a little too small, but with a shim of drink-can aluminum, it fit passably. When I raised the seat high enough, only the recommended-minimum 2" was within the bike's frame. But the bike's sissy bar, when positioned high and angled forward, reached the (regular,



not banana) seat, to which I lashed it as added support.

Unfortunately, with the shim and the lashed sissy bar, the seat won't easily lower for transport. But the high-rise handlebars swivel down after loosening one nut, and that alone allows the bike to fit in some small cars.

The sissy bar plus the sturdy rear fender provides a fairly good rack, to which I lash a load with rubber straps. And the dip of the high-rise handlebars is just right for holding a 5-gal pannier (see May97 DP), which I attach to rings I lashed to the handlebar near the hand grips.

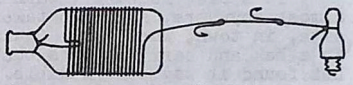
I don't ride fast on this bike. It has only one (low) speed; and, with the short wheel base, small wheels, and high me, a pot hole could literally throw me for a loop. Also, the short cranks give little leverage for climbing hills. But, otherwise, it handles nicely.

If getting a 20" bike, remember, it won't be a bargain at any price if you must buy expensive parts to make it usable. Seat posts are costly at bike shops. On one full-size bike, I used a wooden branch as seat post, but don't yet know how well it will hold up. Julie Summers, November

Crab trap easily made from salvaged items.

Find: hoop (eg, bike rim, bike tire stuffed to stiffen it, flexible branch bent round and lashed to self); fishing net (in trash cans near fishing boats); 2 or 3 pound weight; rope; bait (eg, fish heads or guts). Tie: piece of netting to hoop, weight to center of net, and rope to hoop in 3 or 4 places. Place bait on net. Lower to bottom of water. Wait. After crabs have found bait, pull up. Herbert Diaz, CA 956, 1996

Improvising a fishing reel.



Fasten a weight (a spark plug is easy to tie to) to one end of the fishing line (often found in trash cans on fishing piers, sometimes WITH HOOKS (be careful !). Attach hooks to the line near the weight. Bait is easy to find. (Many people throw away left-overs.)

Tie the other end of the line around the neck of a jar, bottle or drink can that has smooth parallel sides. Then, starting at the neck end, wind the line around the bottle, trying not to overlap turns except for the first few. (You want the line to easily slip off the bottle.)

Hold the neck of the bottle firmly in one hand. With the other, throw the weight to where you hope the fish are. Most fish are one or two pounds and can be easily pulled in with a 6 or 20 pound line. Herbert Diaz, CA 956, 1996

Discarded music strings usable as snare wire.

In a musical-instrument-store dumpster, I found brass or bronze guitar strings, in good condition. Bruce of BC, 1999

Don't get scalded by steam from a hot pot.

It's no fun anywhere, but in the back-country away from medical help, it's worse. When lifting the lid, first raise the FAR side while keeping the NEAR side resting on the pot, so the lid will deflect steam away from you. Also, do not peer in immediately. Let initial blast dissipate. Julie

A better reminder than a string around my finger:

A clothes-pin dangling from my hair onto my forehead. When an easily-burned food is cooking, the clothes-pin reminds me to check, even if I'm doing other things. Julie Summers